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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively analyze the Latin American content of contemporary world geography textbooks published for United States secondary schools. A preliminary review of the literature indicated that Latin America was generally omitted from world geography texts, Central America was given minimal attention, and contemporary politics received inadequate treatment. Six textbooks chosen randomly from professional journal advertisements were analyzed for the space devoted to Latin America and the specific distribution of content on Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil. These five representative study regions were analyzed according to the four main topical areas of historical geography and general culture, physical geography, contemporary trends, and general geographic statements. A comparison of survey findings with results of a 1944 study of textbooks conducted by the American Council on Education indicated the following: a more balanced distribution of topical content among world regions, allocation of space to Latin America equal to that of Europe and Africa, a decrease in the amount of Latin American space devoted to the five surveyed regions, and substantially increased emphasis on contemporary trends. Six tables present survey findings. (LP)

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LATIN AMERICA IN WORLD GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS FOR THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

A person involved in a cross-cultural study can never be truly free of his cultural biases. Such a human characteristic is also true of a textbook writer when he faces the dilemma of having to choose and interpret the content for his book. Furthermore, due to space limitations, the writer must make critical decisions concerning information to be included. Nevertheless, the writer's job is to include content that describes concepts in an objective and balanced fashion. To further insure that this occurs, publishers maintain a number of reviewers who examine textbook content.

However, even with the most critically reviewed textbook, it is impossible to satisfy every interest group. Consequently, revisions are often made to provide for more accurate and objective depictions of the concepts and content presented. Concerning geography, teachers want students to understand and appreciate other cultures without initiating or furthering stereotypes. Although it is not determined to what effect textbook information has on students' attitudes, there is evidence to suggest that accurate presentations are helpful in reducing stereotypes in the classroom.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively analyze the Latin American content of contemporary world geography textbooks published for United States secondary schools. Before attempting this quantitative approach, we felt the textbooks should be analyzed for distribution of content based on natural and cultural landscape classifications. These topical classifications are outlined in the discussion on methodology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive review of the literature indicates a very small number of studies concerning the status of Latin America in world geography textbooks at the secondary school level. Of all studies reviewed, only the 1944 study of Dicken and Wesley for the American Council on Education, (A.C.E.) was quantitative in methodology. The A.C.E. study was a detailed survey of elementary, secondary, and college materials containing information on Latin America. The study quantitatively classified Latin American information by geographical topic. The findings revealed what countries were omitted and topical content not treated.

A more thorough qualitative study was conducted by Vito Perrone in 1965. Perrone updated the A.C.E. study but he analyzed only secondary textbooks for grades seven through twelve. Perrone concluded that textbooks had significantly improved since the 1944 study, especially in the area of United States involvement in Latin America. For example, the A.C.E. report stated that secondary textbooks presented the United States in a favorable position for its help to Latin America. However, by the 1960's, Perrone found the topic of U.S. - Latin American relations was discussed in moderation.

Another study, that of Gill and Conroy in 1968 examined secondary textbooks on Latin America. They compared their findings to those of the 1944 A.C.E. report and Perrone's 1965 study. They concluded that world geography textbooks of the 1960's were including information about world regions not previously presented. Gill and Conroy believed the change was due to the increasing importance of these regions in world affairs.

The most recent research on Latin America in geography textbooks was conducted in 1982 by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, (C.I.B.C.). The Council's following conclusions are relevant to our study: 1. Central

America is omitted from most commonly used world geography textbooks; 2. less space is given to Central America than to other regions; and 3. there is an inadequate amount of information about contemporary politics.

The studies by Gill and Conroy and the C.I.B.C. were qualitative in methodology and no one has done as detailed a study of textbook content as the A.C.E. report. Many reviewers acknowledge the biases present in secondary textbooks, but they often do not support their assertions with a thorough quantitative analysis. In this study, the same criteria was used as the A.C.E. study to quantitatively analyze the image of Latin America in world geography textbooks at the secondary school level.

TEXTBOOK SELECTION

The textbooks included in the study were selected from advertisements in various journals such as Social Education and The Journal of Geography. Publishers willingly provided a copy of their editions of world geography texts to be included in the review. Out of 15 books received, six were randomly chosen to begin a quantitative analysis (Roman numerals are used to denote texts in tables).

The texts include:

V. Danzer, Gerald A., and Albert J. Larson, Land and People: A World Geography. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1979.

VI. Dolevzon, Edward R., and John A. Heine, Our World and Its Peoples. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977.

IV. Drummond, Dorothy W., and Robert R. Drummond. People on Earth: A World Geography. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1983.

II. Gross, Herbert, H., World Geography. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1980.

I. Israel, Saul, Douglas L. Johnson, and Denis Wood, World Geography Today. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980.

III. James, Preston E., and Nelda Davis, Global Geography. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.

PROCEDURES

Our study is patterned after the methodology used by Dicken and Wesley's A.C.E. study of 1944. The survey is limited to five regions. They are: Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina. Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina were chosen because they have traditionally been presented in detail in world geography textbooks. Central America and Venezuela were chosen because of their increasing exposure in the media over the past five years. Our overall objective was not to compare space allocated to the five regions, but to compare the treatment of topics among the six textbooks.

Before we analyzed the content distribution of the five survey regions, we began with a survey of space given to Latin America, in general, along with other world regions. To do this, we scanned each page of the book to tabulate the number of pages devoted to world regions. These regions include: Anglo-America, Latin America, Africa, Europe, Eastern Europe and Soviet Asia, Asia, Oceania, and the Polar Regions. The Polar Regions were not included in the 1944 A.C.E. study.

Next we tabulated the number of pages, maps, and illustrations referring to Latin America and the five selected study regions. To do this, we again surveyed each page of the textbook.

Finally, the five study regions were analyzed according to four main topical categories (chart 1): I. Historical Geography and General Cultural Aspects; II. Physical Geography; III. Contemporary Trends; and IV. General Geographical Statements Dicken and Wesley calculated the pages found in the textbook containing topical information, however, the tallying of sentences was believed more accurate for this study in measuring the depth of coverage for each topic. Major topical categories were then subdivided. The only topical category not present in 1944 was "General Geographical Statements."

CHART 1

TOPICAL CATEGORIES

I. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND GENERAL CULTURAL ASPECTS

II. PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

- Surface Configuration
- Soils
- Climate
- Rivers
- Vegetation

III. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

- Population
- Occupation and Production
  - General Occupation and Production
  - General Agriculture
    - Subsistence
    - Commercial
  - Pastoral
  - Forest
  - Mineral/Petroleum
  - Manufacturing
  - General Trade
    - Import
    - Export
  - Tourism
- Transportation
- Urban
- Government

IV. GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

The following explanations need to be made concerning the topics:

I. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND GENERAL CULTURAL ASPECTS

Historical Geography

Historical geography is the geography of past periods. As far as possible, history was eliminated from the quantitative survey and from consideration in this report. A description of the Maya civilization where, "An Indian population attained a high position in the applied arts, in agriculture, and in social relations," is classified as historical geography, whereas a narrative of the Aztec conquest is regarded as history.

General Cultural Aspects

This category relates to comments on religion, language, race, ethnic origins, and other cultural aspects not covered within the contemporary trends category.

II. PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Material concerning physical geography is divided into five categories. These are: 1. surface configuration (or the topography of the landscape), 2. soils, 3. climate, 4. rivers, and 5. vegetation (or general vegetational patterns for which there was no mention of economic importance). It should be noted that a statement concerning transportation upon rivers is placed under the category transportation, whereas a comment about the length of a river or the abundance of rivers in a country is placed within the section of rivers in physical geography.

III. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

This section comprises the largest topical category. It is divided into five subcategories: 1. population, 2. occupation and production, 3. urban, 4. government, and 5. transportation. Due to the concern by the Council

on Interracial Books for Children of the lack of political content on Central America, the subcategory "Government" was added that was not included in the A.C.E. study.

Population

This category consists of statements concerning population numbers, densities, and changes. It also includes statements on the movement or migration of peoples within the major survey regions.

Occupation and Production

General Occupation and Production

General statements concerning occupation and production consists primarily of sentences that do not exclusively fit the subcategories of this topic. Common examples are: "Many of the people of Mexico are unemployed" or "Brazil has a large workforce although many people can not find jobs near their place of residence," or even "The average annual personal income for Honduras is less than $1,000."

Agriculture

Agriculture is divided into three subcategories: 1. general, 2. subsistence, and 3. commercial. General agricultural statements are those that fit neither the commercial or subsistence categories. Commercial and subsistence agricultural topics range from tools and cultivation methods to types of crops.

Pastoral

Sentences are classified as pastoral if they relate to shepherds or herdsmen and their activities. This category does not include livestock raising which is included in commercial agriculture.

Forest

This category includes sentences dealing with forest resources.

Mineral/Petroleum

This category includes those statements concerning mineral and/or petroleum resources. It must be noted that caution was observed when using this category because many sentences could have been classed in other categories. For example, the statement, "Petroleum is Venezuela's leading export" was classified as a comment concerning petroleum if the topic of the paragraph concerned petroleum in a broad sense. However, had the sentence appeared in a paragraph or section discussing the types of trade Venezuela practiced, then the statement would have been included within the "Trade" category. In all such instances, the theme or topic of the paragraph determines the classification.

Manufacturing

Statements concerning the transformation of raw materials into finished products are placed within the "Manufacturing" category. This category also includes any comments relating to employment, development, and monetary figures associated with manufacturing.

Trade

Due to the wide range of statements dealing with trade, three subcategories were established to cover the topic. These categories are: 1. general trade statements, 2. import, and 3. export. General trade statements are those sentences concerning trade that discuss neither import nor export.

Tourism

This category consists of those sentences dealing with the numbers of tourists, their point of origin, and the economic importance of tourism to the five survey regions.

Transportation

This category includes statements concerning the movement of people and/or goods along developed and maintained routes. Types of routes include: highways, railroads, air transport, canals, and rivers. Statements are also included such as, "Burros are an important way farmers get their crop to market," as a comment on transportation.

Urban

Statements concerning the importance of cities, their size, function, and location are classed as "Urban."

Government

Sentences pertaining to a country's form of government, its political stability, and federally financed and planned programs are classified under "Government." This category also includes those statements concerning foreign relations.

IV. GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

Although not a part of the 1944 A.C.E. survey, this study includes a category for statements of a general geographical nature. This category contains those statements that are mutually exclusive of all other categories. In this category can be found comments ranging from a country's relative location to a lengthy story about a fictional character.

FINDINGS

The findings may best be discussed through the following six tables.

Table 1: The purpose of Table 1 is to compare the space given to world regions within the six chosen textbooks. Percentages pertain to the percent of the text devoted to each region excluding the index, the glossary, atlases, table of contents, chapter review questions, and introductory material on geography and geographic tools.

Across the top of the table are the six books indicated by a Roman numeral. Down the left side are world regions listed according to their present rank. The format of the 1944 study paralleled our world region categories except for the areas of Soviet Asia and Eastern Europe. Because these two areas received a large amount of space and often were presented in a separate chapter from Europe and Asia, the regions were classified independently. The A.C.E. study appears to have placed these regions within the categories of Asia and Europe, thus, we realize the difficulty in comparing the regions.

The two columns at the far right give the total average percentage for all books according to world regions. Comparing the averages, the books surveyed appear to have a more balanced distribution of content between world regions than was evident in 1944.

In terms of rank, the region emphasized the most continues to be Anglo-America. Latin America now ranks fifth in comparison to fourth in 1944. However, the percentage of space given to Latin America, Europe, and Africa are so close, rank order may not be significantly different.

Table 2: This table shows the space given to the five selected Latin American regions according to each of our six textbooks. The table is based on the percentage of total pages dealing only with Latin America. The columns at the far right present the the 1944 average and this study's 1983 average for all textbooks surveyed. By comparing these two columns, one may see a more equitable distribution of text content of the selected Latin America regions when compared with the A.C.E. study. Secondly, one may see the overall percentage for the regions surveyed has decreased from 53.05% in 1944 to 36.8% in 1983. This decrease illustrates that the traditionally taught countries of Brazil and Argentina have given up space to other content areas.

TABLE 1

COMPARATIVE SPACE GIVEN TO WORLD REGIONS IN SELECTED WORLD GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS

(percentage of text pages)

REGION	TEXTS I	II	III	IV	V	VI	AVERAGE 1983	1944
ANGLO AMERICA	20.9	20.1	8.9	20.5	24.6	25.3	20.1	52.9
ASIA	13.7	18.7	30.2	19.4	20.3	16.3	19.8	13.4
AFRICA	18.0	22.4	17.3	14.1	12.1	16.5	16.7	2.0
EUROPE	17.5	12.3	18.6	13.8	15.5	15.8	15.6	19.6
LATIN AMERICA	14.7	15.0	8.4	20.5	14.4	12.4	14.2	10.2
SOVIET ASIA & EASTERN EUROPE	9.5	3.2	10.8	4.4	1.7	10.8	6.7	X
OCEANIA	5.7	8.2	5.8	5.9	9.6	2.5	6.3	1.6
POLAR REGIONS	0	0	0	1.4	1.8	.2	.6	-
PAGES ANALYZED	422	219	415	341	354	442		
TOTAL TEXT PAGES	519	518	571	560	607	552		

TABLE 2

SPACE ANALYSIS BY LATIN AMERICAN REGION

(percentage of total pages on Latin America)

REGION	TEXT I	II	III	IV	V	VI	AVERAGE 1983	1944
MEXICO	6.45	12.12	8.57	6.57	18.63	5.45	16.25	10.45
CENTRAL AMERICA	4.84	12.12	2.86	6.43	2.94	3.64	5.47	7.50
VENEZUELA	1.61	7.06	2.86	2.86	3.92	1.82	3.36	2.90
BRAZIL	5.65	7.06	8.57	5.71	7.83	6.36	6.86	20.55
ARGENTINA	3.23	7.06	2.86	2.86	5.88	7.27	4.86	11.65
TOTAL LATIN AMERICAN PAGES IN TEXT	62	33	35	70	51	55	TOTAL AVERAGE % 36.8	53.05

Table 3: Table 2 shows the number of maps and illustrations per text by region. The maps are tallied by region only if the map covers that region. A map of South America, for example, is labeled a Latin American map rather than dividing it between Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil.

On the average, for the six books surveyed, content on Mexico and Central America usually included at least one map. By contrast, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela received less. The average number of Latin American maps one could expect to find in a textbook was ten.

Illustrations include pictures, graphs, and tables. If a picture lacks a caption explaining its location, it is counted as a general Latin American map. Brazil outnumbers all the regions surveyed. Overall, there is an average of twenty-nine illustrations on Latin America for all six books.

One cannot compare our findings to the A.C.E. findings because the A.C.E. reviewers counted pages of maps and illustrations rather than individual maps or illustrations. One does not know how many pictures or maps were on the pages analyzed in 1944.

Table 4: Table 4 presents the percentage of space given to each region surveyed for the four major topical categories. Each percentage includes content from all six textbooks.

In 1982, the Council on Interracial Books for Children discussed the lack of content coverage for Central America. However, according to our findings, Central America appears to be covered as well as any other surveyed region. Although Central America is comprised of seven countries while the other surveyed regions are single countries, the data show that Central American coverage has slightly improved since 1944.

TABLE 3

MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

(number of maps, tables, charts, and photos)

	TEXTS						AVERAGE
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
MAPS							
MEXICO	.5	-	1	1	1	2	.92
CENTRAL AMERICA	.5	1	1	1	2	1	1.08
VENEZUELA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BRAZIL	1	-	-	-	-	1	.33
ARGENTINA	1	-	-	-	-	1	.33
LATIN AMERICA	4	10	3	15	6	6	7.33
TOTAL	7	11	5	17	9	11	10.00
ILLUSTRATIONS							
MEXICO	4	4	3	3	5	2	3.50
CENTRAL AMERICA	2	6	4	7	-	5	4.00
VENEZUELA	1	1	1	2	-	1	1.00
BRAZIL	6	2	2	9	12	2	5.50
ARGENTINA	4	1	1	6	-	5	2.83
LATIN AMERICA	21	15	8	-	20	9	12.17
TOTAL	38	29	19	27	37	24	29.00

TABLE 4

SPACE ANALYSIS BY TOPIC AND REGION

(average of total books)

TOPIC	MEXICO	CENTRAL AMERICA	ARGENTINA	BRAZIL	VENEZUELA	AVERAGE %
I	14.93	15.61	14.42	12.04	3.50	12.10
II	11.25	10.69	14.46	16.72	12.11	13.06
III	58.59	54.22	54.40	58.75	63.68	57.93
IV	15.54	19.51	16.76 11.76	12.53	20.43 11.93	16.95 14.25

TABLE 5

SPACE ANALYSIS BY TOPIC AND TEXT

(percentage for all Latin American regions surveyed)

	TEXT						AVERAGE	
TOPIC	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	1983	1944
I	8.68	5.63	27.52	15.00	12.48	5.68	12.50	7.8
II	14.52	14.50	7.37	18.71	9.45	13.72	13.05	16.9
III	62.41	58.72	54.51	58.77	46.65	63.95	57.50	62.6
IV	14.39	21.15	10.60	7.52	31.42	16.65	16.96	Unclassified 12.7

There are two different percentages for Argentina and Venezuela. In book V., there was a story of a Venezuelan and another of an Argentine that was categorized under "General Geographical Statements." The top percentage includes the story while the bottom percentage does not. However, looking at the average percentages for topic four on the far right, the stories do not seem to have made a significant impact.

Spacial content for topic III. "Contemporary Trends," greatly outnumbers the other topics. Obviously, the large number of subcategories within the major topic contributes to the high percentage.

Again one cannot compare our findings to the A.C.E. report because A.C.E. did not present data for each topic by country.

Table 5: In Table 5, the surveyed regions were combined within each textbook to show the space given to the four topical categories. On the right are the averages of all texts for each category. As previously mentioned, the 1944 study did not include the topic "General Geographical Statements." Consequently, the total percentages for groups I, II, and III were subtracted from 100%. The remaining 12.7% was labeled "Unclassified."

Comparing the 1983 averages to the 1944 averages, there is still stronger emphasis placed on contemporary trends than any other topic. The only significant change is the increased space given to historical geography and cultural aspects.

The following is a review of the survey's findings:

1. The books surveyed are more balanced in distribution of topical content among world regions than in 1944.
2. Anglo-America continues to have the greatest amount of space allocation, while Latin America has fallen from fourth to fifth place in rankings since 1944.

3. The percentage of space allocated to Latin America is not significantly different from space allocated to Europe and Africa.
4. In 1944, more than half of the content on Latin America focused on the five surveyed regions, while in 1983, only 36.8% was given to the regions.
5. Less space is now allocated to Brazil and Argentina than traditionally practiced.
6. Mexico has had a significant increase in space allocation since 1944.
7. The books surveyed are basically consistent in distribution of content among the four major topical categories.
8. The books surveyed are basically consistent in distribution of content by survey regions among the four major topical categories.
9. "Contemporary Trends" comprises over half of the content for each surveyed region.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After reviewing the data, world geography textbook writers appear to be consistent in the amount of space given to the Latin American topics they present. Whether or not we agree with such a distribution was not this study's purpose. In this study, we wanted to present information to textbook authors, publishers, and teachers that compares the distribution of content among a sample of world geography textbooks. Table 6 includes a more detailed look at the four major topical categories analyzed. From this table, one may see an overemphasized or underemphasized topical subcategory, such as the lack of attention given to tourism in Mexico or the overemphasis on Central American transportation.

In terms of recommendations, our first thought is to enlarge the sample of books surveyed. An enlarged sample is necessary to determine if the spacial percentages we found are representative of world geography

TABLE 6

AVERAGE DISTRIBUTION OF TOPICAL CONTENT PER COUNTRY

(numbers are percent of pages analyzed for all books)

TOPIC	MEXICO	CENTRAL AMERICA	VENEZUELA	BRAZIL	ARGENTINA	AVERAGE %
I. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS	14.93	15.61	3.50	12.04	14.42	12.10
II. PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY						
SURFACE CONFIGURATION	5.16	3.89	2.76	5.32	4.82	4.39
SOILS	1.72	1.25	-	.83	1.36	1.03
CLIMATE	2.86	4.22	.82	4.06	4.13	3.22
RIVERS	.90	.28	7.35	5.41	1.59	3.11
VEGETATION	.34	1.05	1.48	1.10	2.56	1.31
III. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS						
POPULATION	5.02	6.19	3.17	5.59	2.74	4.54
OCCUPATION AND PRODUCTION						
GENERAL (O & P)	3.68	3.74	5.30	6.78	3.28	5.76
AGRICULTURE						
GENERAL	7.52	3.42	4.01	7.14	5.42	5.50
SUBSISTENCE	3.54	1.79	-	1.65	-	1.40
COMMERCIAL	4.86	5.36	1.13	5.43	7.18	4.79
PASTORAL	.22	-	-	.54	.41	.23
FOREST	.21	1.70	-	.69	1.50	.82
MINERAL/PETROLEUM	6.07	1.65	20.41	6.25	4.30	7.74
MANUFACTURING	4.08	2.33	3.32	5.45	8.63	4.76
TRADE						
GENERAL	.85	1.35	.37	1.48	.79	.97
IMPORT	.32	.62	.94	.97	.92	.75
EXPORT	1.16	3.21	4.70	4.57	4.47	3.62
TOURISM	1.43	-	-	-	.09	.30
TRANSPORTATION	.35	12.84	1.26	1.90	2.28	3.73
URBAN	8.42	.43	5.44	6.87	3.06	4.84
GOVERNMENT	4.86	9.59	13.63	3.44	9.33	8.17
IV. GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS	15.54	19.51	20.43	12.53	16.76	16.95

texts available to school districts. Our second recommendation is to select a portion of the quantitative data, such as contemporary trends, or even a smaller category, such as population, and attempt a qualitative study. As we see it, one should not judge the textbooks only in terms of content distribution because content quality is of paramount importance. Consequently, this study presents the first step of a content analysis, but alone, the information should be of interest to people associated with world geography textbooks.

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